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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BAGHDAD 001032

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TAGS: KWMN PGOV PHUM PREL IZ

SUBJECT: CHARGE AND MOHR DISCUSS MEK, KUWAITI MIAS, HUMAN
RIGHTS ISSUES

REF: A. BAGHDAD 990
¶B. BAGHDAD 840

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires, a.i Patricia A. Butenis for reasons 1
.4 (b) and (d).

Summary

¶11. (C) Minister of Human Rights (MoHR) Wijdan Salim expressed satisfaction with the program G/IWI has planned for her official April 19-26 visit to Washington, D.C., during which she will meet with senior USG officials and human rights organizations. An issue Salim is likely to raise in her U.S. talks is the spread of child labor and sex trafficking in Iraq and the increasing numbers of abandoned children. Salim attributes these trends to a general decline of morals and is frustrated that GOI leadership focuses exclusively on the economy and security, while neglecting social issues. Salim assured the Charge that the MoHR is working hard to resolve the Kuwaiti missing in action (MIA) issue, but is confronted with numerous problems. With regard to moving the MEK out of Camp Ashraf, Salim said the MoHR is trying to find another location. The matter is complicated by the refusal of some MEK members to move and the difficulty of getting third countries to accept others. Salim said she has raised the persecution of Iraqi gay people with Prime Minister Al-Maliki, noting the issue is complicated by public attitudes toward gays and the Koranic prohibition of homosexuality. She reiterated that there are no people sentenced to death in Iraq for homosexual conduct (ref A). Eight death row inmates are scheduled to be executed in the coming week, which is likely to provoke international protests. Following GOI claims that some detainees released by MNF-I are committing crimes, MNF-I has reduced the number of detainees released per month, in order to give the GOI more time to review detainee files. Salim mentioned that she thwarted a move by some senior GOI officials to grant another general amnesty. The Charge noted tense Arab-Kurd relations will be a top issue for the new Ambassador. End summary.

Child Trafficking Suggests Moral Decline

¶12. (C) In an April 9 meeting with the Charge, MoHR Wijdan Salim said she was pleased with the program of State Department, Capitol Hill, and U.S. and international human rights organization meetings G/IWI is planning for her week-long (April 19-26) Washington, D.C. visit. An issue that Salim will likely highlight during her visit is the growing number of Iraqi children trafficked for labor and sex. Another troubling trend, she believes, is a marked increase of unwed mothers abandoning their offspring. Salim said that last year over 100 abandoned children were housed in Diyala Hospital alone. According to Salim, the increasing number of unwed mothers indicates declining moral standards, as does the spreading custom of the "pleasure marriage" (Note: Salim was referring to the "mut'a" or temporary marriage, which a women might agree to for financial reasons. End note.) Salim added there was a need to educate men not to marry more

than one wife, if they could not afford to. Salim said she had raised these issues with the PM and pressed him to focus more on social problems, and not only the economy and security. The PM replied that Iraq needed much more financial support in order to deal with social issues. The PM deplored the proliferation of nightclubs and bars in Baghdad, but acknowledged that forbidding such locales would only earn the GOI criticism for being "undemocratic."

Kuwaiti MIAs Issue Stalling GOI-GOK Relations

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¶13. (C) The Charge raised the apparent lack of progress on the Kuwaiti MIA issue, which is hindering the development of good GOI-GOK relations in her view. Salim stressed that the MoHR is working very hard on locating the MIAs, but complained that the Kuwaitis are vague about identifying the locations to be searched. For example, the Kuwaitis tell the MoHR to look for the MIAs "around Karbala," without providing any specific information. Salim also noted problems in getting those who claim to be witnesses to testify. For example, a man currently residing in Syria claims knowledge of MIAs around Fallujah, but at first wanted to be paid for information. When his demand was rebuffed by the MoHR, which offered to bring him to Iraq to testify, he expressed concern that if he returned to Iraq, he might be arrested on the suspicion that his knowledge implicated him in the disappearance of the Kuwaitis. Salim noted that PM al-Maliki had told her he would stop any effort to arrest the prospective witness and that she should spare no effort in resolving the Kuwaiti MIA issue.

BAGHDAD 00001032 002 OF 003

¶14. (C) Salim pointed out there are thousands of missing Iraqis, too few MoHR staff, a lack of expertise and equipment, and inefficient coordination with other GOI ministries. Salim noted only two DNA samples can be tested a day in Iraq, but the GOI refuses to let samples be exported for testing. Salim mentioned MoHR staff had started excavation training with the assistance of the International Commission on Missing Persons (ICMP) (Note: ICMP is a DRL-funded program, but UNAMI is funding the Kuwaiti MIA project. ICMP told us that in fact no excavations on Kuwaiti MIAs have begun, but training of MoHR staff in excavation techniques for these sites is slated to begin in August. End Note). The Charge reiterated that given the relatively small number (200) of Kuwaiti MIAs, resolving the issue was achievable and would significantly boost GOI-GOK bilateral relations.

Relocating Camp Ashraf Residents

¶15. (C) Salim told the Charge the MoHR is trying to find another location, such as a base vacated by the CF, for Camp Ashraf residents. A complicating factor is that some Ashraf residents refuse to leave, insisting that Ashraf is on "their" land. Salim noted that about 900 Ashraf residents had been counted in the MoHR's survey of residents. According to Salim, the GOI has told them they are free to leave the camp. Two women and a boy have agreed to leave, but many others ask the MoHR where they should go and who will support them. Some who have left have requested financial assistance from the MoHR. (Note: One man, who went to Turkey, contacted both the Embassy and the MoHR for assistance (ref B). End note.)

¶16. (C) Salim noted that UNHCR refuses to meet with MEK members in Ashraf, but would consider potential refugee claims if they leave the camp and the organization. Almost 1000 of the MEK in Ashraf have some sort of claim to a third country; Salim claimed that five are U.S. citizens. (Note: Three are known U.S. citizens; two have claims to U.S. citizenship. End note.) Some of the Ashraf MEK have asked

if the GOI would intervene with the Government of Iran and ask for assurances that they would not be harmed if they returned to Iran as an unarmed organization. Salim noted that this was not an option for 55 Ashraf residents, who are wanted by the Iranian authorities.

Persecution of Iraqi Gays, Death Penalty

¶17. (C) In response to the Charge's asking whether Iraqis raise the LGBT issue with her (Ref A), Salim noted that people in Baghdad dislike seeing gays in public places, such as cafes. She claimed many people say they are persecuted as gays in order to increase their chances of leaving Iraq (e.g., through the UNHCR), and noted that the Koran forbids homosexuality. Salim reported that she raised the recent murders of gay men with Prime Minister Al-Maliki, who told her that "there may be punishment (for homosexual conduct), but that is for a judge to decide." Salim assured the Charge that no one in Iraq is on death row for being homosexual. According to Salim, the GOI plans to execute eight death row inmates the week of April 13. The Charge noted that the GOI could expect international protests, especially from EU countries. Salim commented that Islam believes the death penalty is required; those who suggest abolishing it for the sake of improving Iraq's international image, should consider Iraqi views first.

Detainee Releases Proceeding, Albeit At Slower Pace

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¶18. (C) With regard to MNF-I's Task Force-134 monthly releases of detainees, the Charge noted the GOI has alleged some of those released are committing crimes. MNF-I provides the GOI with the files of all prospective releases and gives the GOI 70 days to review the files (Note: Salim thought it was 30 days. End note.) Since the GOI apparently has difficulty in completing a review of each detainee's file, the CG has ordered fewer released every month. Salim acknowledged that in some cases the GOI may only look at the GOI files of a prisoner, and not the MNF-I files. Salim told the Charge that some in GOI leadership had pushed for another general amnesty, especially for Sadists and Jaysh Al-Mahdi (JAM) members. Salim said she refused outright, and was supported by the Minister of Defense. A couple of days ago, however, someone raised it again with the PM, who replied: "Why there should be another amnesty, if not even the MoHR wants one?"

Tense Arab-Kurd Relations

BAGHDAD 00001032 003 OF 003

¶19. (C) The Charge and Salim agreed that the Kurds have not handled relations with Baghdad well, particularly with regard to the disputed territories. The Charge noted the USG is waiting for the neutral UNAMI report on the situation and that Arab-Kurd relations would be a top priority for the new Ambassador, as an outbreak of violence between the Iraqi Army and the Peshmerga would be disastrous for Iraq.

BUTENIS